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To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein
<allen.klein@gmail.com>

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BALAK - 5784

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Jul 17, 2024 subject: Rav Frand - Bilaam Lost His Shock Value Parshas Balak

Bilaam Lost His Shock Value

Apparently, Bilaam had a relationship with Hashem that we can only dream about. And yet we see that he had an attitude that is hard to fathom. When Hashem asked Bilaam, "Who are these people with you?" Rashi explains that Bilaam answers Hashem arrogantly: "Even though I am not important in your eyes, I am important in the eyes of kings."

Later, in one of the most mind-boggling incidents in the Torah, Bilaam does not appear to be at all phased by the fact that his donkey starts talking to him. He just answers back and begins a dialogue with his donkey as if it was an everyday occurrence. How do we explain the paradoxical personality of Bilaam?

Rav Schwab offers an interesting insight. Hashem gave us certain senses. Most of us are blessed with the senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. But there is also a sixth sense. That is the sense of being able to be nispael (impressed).

Hashem gave most human beings the ability to be impressed by certain phenomenon in this world.

This sense of being nispael is necessary for our avodas (service of) Hashem. The Rambam speaks of a person becoming impressed and overwhelmed with the awe of creation, and of the wisdom and beauty of nature. This is a sense that we need to develop within ourselves — emotions of love and reverence towards the Creator.

However, just like the other senses can be deadened and destroyed if they are abused, the same is true with the sixth sense. If a person listens to loud music for long enough, he can lose his sense of hearing. If a person continuously eats very spicy foods, he can damage his sense of taste. Likewise, a person can lose his sense of being nispael. How does that happen? What costs a person his sense of being impressed? Rav Schwab suggests that a person can lose his sense of being nispael through gluttonous indulgence in every passion and lust in the world. If a person is obsessed with enjoying, taking, eating, consuming, and all he ever thinks about is indulging in the most obscene and gluttonous fashion, then after a while, nothing impresses him anymore. He is so consumed with just enjoying himself that nothing gets him excited anymore.

If it seems hard to relate to this concept, all we need to do is to open our eyes and look at what has happened in the western world. Nothing makes an impression anymore. Movies have become more and more violent and explicit. Music has become more and more outrageous. The way people talk and the words we hear have become more and more astounding, because nothing makes an impression anymore. As a society, we have lost our sense of wonder. We have become coarsened.

To quote a recent piece in the Op-Ed page of the Baltimore Sun, "America has lost its 'shock value.' Nothing shocks anymore."

That is what happened to Bilaam. Nothing shocked him. His animal spoke to him and he took it in stride.

Everyone recognizes the seriousness of losing a sense of sight or hearing, chas v'shalom (Heaven forbid). We need to recognize that losing the sense of being nispael is a similarly serious by-product of the gluttonous and indulgent life that Bilaam lived.

The Tircha D'tzibbura Of Reciting Parshas Bilaam Daily The Torah testifies that Bilaam was "yodeah daas Elyon" (he knew the thoughts of his Creator). The Talmud (Brochos 7a) explains that this means that he knew how to precisely pinpoint the times that were auspicious for invoking the wrath of Hashem. The Talmud speaks of a certain moment each day when Hashem becomes angry with the world. Bilaam knew how to gauge that moment, and this knowledge was his secret weapon. He intended to synchronize his cursing of the Jewish people with that moment of Hashem's wrath, and thereby bring Hashem's wrath down upon the Jewish nation.

Rav Elyakim Schlessinger asks (in his sefer, Beis Av): If, in fact, Bilaam's power was limited to knowing the moment of

Hashem's anger, that would seem to be a far cry from the Torah's testimony that he was yodeah daas Elyon — he knew the mind of his Creator. The Beis Av therefore cites a Rabbinic teaching regarding the creation of the world.

Hashem originally intended to create the world using only His middas haddin (attribute of justice). In such a world, if someone would do an aveira, the punishment would be delivered immediately. But when Hashem saw that human beings would not be able to exist in such a world, He partnered the middas harachamim (attribute of mercy) with the middas haddin. This does not mean that if someone does an aveira, Hashem will just forget about it. It simply means that Hashem extends a grace period. Hashem gives the sinner some slack, so to speak, giving him the ability to ultimately repent. This combination of din (judgment) and rachamim (mercy) is the way the world operates.

Bilaam knew "daas Elyon". That means that he was aware of Hashem's original plan. He knew that Hashem originally wanted to create the world with only the middas haddin. Bilaam knew that every single day of every single year there is one moment when Hashem returns to his original plan and looks at the world with the middas haddin. This is what the Gemara means that during one moment of the day, Hashem gets angry. At that moment, chas v'shalom, anything can happen. The middas haddin has free reign at that moment. This knowledge was Bilaam's great strength.

Bilaam's power was to always look at the world askance. The Mishna (Avos 5:22) teaches that Bilaam had an 'evil eye.' This means that Bilaam looked at the world in a non-generous fashion, rather than with an eye toward the middas harachamim. He would always look with an eye toward invoking the middas haddin.

This explains why Bilaam refers to himself as the "one eyed man." Who would ever describe himself as delivering "the speech of a one-eyed man?" Is being blind in one eye something to brag about and be proud of? Man was given two eyes: One eye to look at things with the middas haddin and one eye to look at things with the middas harachamim. Bilaam did not see the positive, only the negative. Bilaam bragged that he was a person who always looks only with an 'evil eye.' "My claim to fame is that I can invoke judgment against the Jewish people because I know when the Creator utilizes only his attribute of judgment."

Our great salvation was "lo hibit avven b'Yaakov" (He perceived no iniquity in Jacob) (Bamidbar 23:21). In all the days that Bilaam tried to invoke the attribute of judgment, Hashem in His mercy, abstained from anger and never looked at us with middas haddin.

Finally, homiletically, the Beis Av suggests that this is the intention of the Gemara in Brochos that says that if not for the tircha d'tzibbura (great trouble for the congregation), the chachomim would have instituted the recital of the parsha of Balak in the middle of the daily recitation of Shema. The

standard interpretation of this Gemara is that we would have included the reading of Balak within — in addition to — the reading of Krias Shema. However, the Beis Av cites an opinion from the Satmar Rebbe that the Gemara is making an even stronger statement: We would have REPLACED the reading of Krias Shema with that of Parshas Balak. If that is the case, how would that be tircha d'tzibbura? We can understand the tircha d'tzibbura if the option was to read both the three sections of Krias Shema AND Parshas Balak. The inclusion of such an additional paragraph in Shema would take more time, creating a burden for the congregation. If, however, the alternative was to replace Krias Shema with Balak, there would not have been a net increase in the amount of time required, so how would it trouble the congregation?

The answer is that the tircha d'tzibbura is from hearing twice daily — "Kel zoem b'chol yom" — that Hashem is angry every day at least momentarily and that at that time the middas haddin is given free reign. We would be demoralized. We would not be able to handle the thought. A smile would not appear on our faces the entire day. The thought is too chilling to contemplate daily. That is the tircha d'tzibbura to which the Gemara is referring.

Whether we recite it daily or not, this fact remains the truth. Chas v'shalom, when we see tragedies in our midst — tragedies that seemingly should not have occurred and do not seem to make any sense — we ponder and ask ourselves, 'Why?' Sometimes, such tragedies can be the result of the severe middas haddin that can affect anyone at any time. This is why a person must constantly examine his actions on a daily basis. Teshuva is not something that should only be relegated to the Aseres Yemei Teshuva (Ten Days of Repentance). The antidote to middas haddin is the middas harachamim, which we will be granted if we show Hashem that we are constantly introspecting and that we are willing to improve.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem
DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman;
Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2024 by Torah.org.

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

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subject: Tidbits for Parashas Balak in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

Parashas Balak • July 20th • 14 Tamuz 5784

The fast of Shiva Asar B'Tamuz is this Tuesday, July 23rd. Five tragedies occurred on Shiva Asar B'Tamuz: 1) The first Luchos were broken; 2) In the waning days of the First Bais Hamikdash, the daily tamid offering ceased to be brought; 3)

In the waning days of the Second Bais Hamikdash, the walls of Yerushalayim were breached, ultimately leading to its destruction; 4) Apostomos burned a Sefer Torah; and 5) An avodah zarah was placed in the Bais Hamikdash.

During chazaras hashatz of Shacharis, the sheliach tzibbur adds Aneinu as a stand-alone berachah (between Go'el Yisrael and Refa'einu). Selichos, Avinu Malkeinu, Tachanun, and Kerias haTorah follow chazaras hashatz. Tefillas Minchah includes Kerias haTorah with the haftarah of Dirshu Hashem. Those fasting add Aneinu (as part of Shema Koleinu). Bircas Kohanim is recited in chazaras hashatz. Sim Shalom replaces Shalom Rav (Nusach Ashkenaz). Chazaras hashatz is followed by Avinu Malkeinu.

The Y'mei Bein Hametzarim, the Three Weeks, begin at shekiya (sunset) on Monday evening, July 22nd. These Three Weeks between the 17th of Tamuz and the 9th of Av, are a national period of mourning over the Churban of both Batei Mikdash. One should give focus to the churban and galus during this period. Activities restricted during this period include: Music and Dancing: Children of chinuch age are included. Many poskim are lenient when the music is secondary in nature (e.g. background music on a story CD) or when the listening is not for enjoyment (e.g. to help one stay awake while driving). Many poskim are stringent regarding a cappella "sefirah music". Playing and practicing music are permitted for the purpose of earning a livelihood (e.g. professional musician). Playing music to develop one's skill is a matter of dispute amongst the poskim.

Haircuts and Shaving: Men, women and children are included in the prohibition. In cases of discomfort, many permit women to tweeze and remove hair from areas other than the head. One should consult a Rav in regards to a father, sandek and mohel at a bris, and in regard to an avel who finishes the sheloshim mourning period during this time.

Weddings: Weddings are not held during this period. An engagement may be celebrated, although without dancing or music. A Sheva Berachos may be held without music, although dancing (and singing) is permitted.

Shehecheyanu: We avoid situations that would necessitate reciting the berachah of shehecheyanu (e.g. eating new fruits, etc.).

Miscellaneous: One should consult a Rav regarding signing a contract on a new home, moving into a new home, house decorating and elective surgery.

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levanah in the USA is this Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Balak, July 20th.

As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael unfortunately continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim and performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael in travail and captivity as well as for the soldiers in battle.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 6

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Basra 24 • Yerushalmi: Maaser Sheni 46 • Mishnah Yomis: Kiddushin 1:8-9 • Oraysa: Next week is Succah 32b-34b.

When Bilaam's donkey stops him on his way to Balak, Bilaam tells the malach that "If it is bad in your eyes then I will return home" (22:34). To which the Malach replies, "Go with these people". Rashi explains with the Midrash, "B'derech she'adam rotzeh leleich ba, molichin oso" i.e., a person is led along the path he wishes to travel, even a path of wrongdoing. Thus, Bilaam was allowed to go ahead on the evil path he chose.

Rav Moshe Chodosh zt"l asks: Why didn't Rashi bring this lesson earlier in the parasha, when Hashem gave Bilaam initial permission to go?

Rav Chodosh answers that while Bilaam may have been agreeable to return home had he been forced to, this was obviously not his desire. This was evident now that he sought to forge ahead despite repeated warning signs that this was not Hashem's will. Thus, we see here specifically that the inner will of a person has the ability to overpower him and lead him down the road he seeks to take.

It can be added that Bilaam says to Balak "Lo uchal laavor es Pi Hashem" (24:13), I am unable to violate the word of Hashem. It was only the direct word of "Pi Hashem" that would be an obstacle for Bilaam, yet he still sought any means to circumvent it. When it comes to a country's civil laws it is indeed possible to find loopholes to get around the 'letter' of the law, despite violating the spirit of the law. But when dealing with Hashem, Who seeks our hearts and our love for Him, it is not enough merely to follow the letter of the law as recorded in Shulchan Aruch. We need to adhere to His underlying will and make His will, ours (Pirkei Avos 2:4). By ensuring that our actions abide not only to the language of the command, but to Hashem's true intent, we are promised that He in turn will take care of our own wishes.

klalgovoah.org Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830

<https://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/belief-in-redemption-belief-in-every-jew/2024/07/17/>

Belief in Redemption, Belief in Every Jew Rabbi Moshe Taragin

History has a beginning and an end. The process of advancing history toward its conclusion is called but a core value of Jewish belief.

Yet, the specific details of redemption remain murky and cryptic. According to the Midrash, Ya'akov, on his deathbed, assembled his children, hoping to provide a road map for the messianic era. However, his plan was thwarted from above, as his prophetic spirit or ru'ach hakodesh was temporarily suspended. Ironically, the only person in the Torah who provides a coded road map of redemption is the Gentile Prophet Bilam, whose fourth and final nevuah addresses events

that will unfold in “the end of days.” Broadly speaking, though, the details of redemption remain shrouded in secrecy. For numerous reasons our Masorah intentionally avoids excessive scrutiny of Yemot HaMashiach or Messianic matters. Too much focus on the future can lead to runaway messianic fervor, raising unrealistic expectations which, when unfulfilled, can be dispiriting. Secondly, focusing too sharply on the bright utopian future can easily distract us from the relatively dreary affairs and responsibilities of our current situation. Messianism can easily slip into escapism and fantasy. Jewish consciousness is delicately balanced between the here and now and the golden future we anxiously await. Finally, as redemptive belief is predicated on a strong, unshakable sense of historical mission, extreme and radical actions can mistakenly be justified to achieve a higher, divine goal of redemption.

For these and other reasons Judaism was always cautious about peering too deeply into the mystery of redemption. To paraphrase the Rambam (Melachim 12:2), we will know the details of Moshiach only after he arrives. Yet, despite the obscurity of the messianic details, Judaism’s unconditional belief in redemption profoundly shaped both Jewish identity and general human history.

Navigating Adversity

Redemption assures us that the world is constantly surging to a better state. No matter how dark or dysfunctional the world appears to be, we resolutely cling to the belief that God continues to drive our world to its inevitable better future. Though evil can temporarily sidetrack this trajectory, the overall arc of redemption is woven into the fabric of history. Belief in redemption offers us strength and solace during gloomy periods of history. For this reason, redemptive interest often surged in the wake of national tragedies. As early as the second century, the great Tana, Rabbi Akiva assumed that Bar-Kochba was the Moshiach. How else to explain the brutal and vicious Roman persecution of our people?

About 1,200 years later, redemptive enthusiasm spiked in the aftermath of the Spanish Inquisition. Once the epitome of Jewish cultural and intellectual achievement, Spanish Jews were now scattered as refugees across the globe, homeless and penniless. This dramatic surge in messianic eagerness accounted, in part, for the renewed interest in the study of Kabbalah.

Redemptive fervor also swelled in the late 17th century, in the aftermath of the bloody Khmelnytsky Uprising, during which tens of thousands of Jews were brutally murdered, a tragedy that abruptly and violently ended the first golden era of Polish Jewry. This messianic intensity fueled the rise of the Chassidic movement, which spotlighted Jewish hopes for, and belief in, redemption. Throughout our history, we remained convinced that a better world awaits us, regardless of the adversity and hostility we faced. Steadfast optimism in a hopeful future and in the possibility of redemption provided us with the strength

to overcome stiff historical challenges. During the bleakest moments of history, when the world around us came crashing down, redemptive belief strengthened our national resilience. A Dynamic World

Viewing history as a redemptive journey also fosters belief in historical dynamism. Redemption implies that history is moving toward a divinely ordained goal and suggests that current conditions are not permanent and can be improved. To the redemptive imagination history is malleable and can be transformed.

The conviction that Hashem propels the world to a better state also empowered man to take accountability and participate in this process, as Hashem’s partner. It encouraged belief in human potential and emphasized that individuals and societies are capable of profound change and improvement.

Furthermore, redemption, as part of a larger covenant with Hashem, implies that human actions matter and are capable of influencing both divine favor and historical outcomes. By asserting that history is purposeful and has direction, belief in redemption inspires us to view our lives as part of a larger, dynamic story. Finally, belief in redemption assumes that there is order and purpose to our world. As there is a divine author directing history, events aren’t random. Belief in a rational and orderly universe supervised by a purposeful Hashem encouraged man to pursue knowledge as a way of understanding that divine will. This pursuit of knowledge yielded exploration, discovery, and innovation.

Redemption fixes our imaginations on this world and its vast potential while shifting our attention away from the afterlife. Utopia isn’t deferred to a different world but can be crafted in this one.

Religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, which view history as cyclical rather than linear, do not acknowledge the end point of historical redemption. Not incidentally, these cultures aren’t as developed as Western civilization, which, under the Judeo-Christian influence, experienced dramatic political, economic, scientific and educational advancements, many of which were fueled by a redemptive outlook of history.

Redemption is Inclusive

Aside from framing this world as dynamic, belief in redemption also cultivates collectivism by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all individuals possessing a shared destiny. Our historical covenant is not just individual but communal, binding the entire Jewish community into a collective relationship with Hashem. Additionally, belief in historical redemption reinforces our belief in personal redemption. If history can change, so can individuals. Appreciating the potential for change in other people makes us more patient and supportive of them, and, hopefully, less judgmental of their flaws or limitations. Belief in redemption stretches our imagination beyond the present and beyond the individual or even the communal. Redemption opens our imagination to the future and stretches our interest to an entire

nation and ultimately to the entire world, which we hope one day to redeem.

Chabad

Last week marked the 30th anniversary of the death of the seventh Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson zt"l. One of the most distinguished and influential rabbis of the past few centuries, he almost single-handedly turned the Chabad movement into one of the most expansive, inclusive, and important worldwide Jewish movements.

The Rebbe deepened redemptive awareness. His lectures, writings, and teachings constantly examined the redemption that he thought was imminent and for which he so fervently prayed. His heightened redemptive passion generated a deep love for, and embrace of, every Jew regardless of their religious level of observance. Every Jew became part of his redemptive vision, and every Jew had a role in accelerating his longed-for historical end point of redemption.

Based on the Rebbe's influence, Chabad's extensive network of shluchim or emissaries continues to tirelessly and selflessly perform outreach to every Jew in a friendly and nonjudgmental fashion, making every Jew feel valued and accepted, regardless of their level of observance or knowledge.

During this moment in history, as we all search for formulas to unite our people, the Rebbe's life and his legacy remind us that one route to unity is pondering our common redemptive destiny. During the past nine months since October 7, we have spent so much energy contemplating our common past as our unifying narrative. Perhaps we should also visualize the future as a common destiny which includes every Jew.

One of the many legacies of the Rebbe was how his longing for redemption stoked his love for every Jew.

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1104122>

Rav Soloveitchik on Balak: Giving Charity with Charity
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

The Apter Rebbe, Avraham Yehoshua Heschel, was known after his principal written work, *Ohev Yisra'el*. As the title signals, the rebbe was an exceptional proponent and exemplar of ahavat Yisra'el, the mitzvah to love one's fellow Jew. He was fond of saying that every single parashah contains some reference to this mitzvah, and on one occasion was asked by a stumped Chassid where to find it in Parashat Balak. The rebbe answered that there is an obvious allusion: the name Balak (בלק) is an acronym for the very words of the mitzvah, "love your fellow as yourself" (ואהבת לרעך כמוך) (Leviticus 19:18). The Chassid protested that this is forced, since it requires pairing the bet and kof of Balak (בלק) with a vav (ואהבת) and kaf (כמוך). The rebbe responded with a profound insight: "You have been my Chassid all these years. Haven't

you learned yet that when it comes to ahavat Yisra'el, you can't be so precise about the exact lettering?"

The Apter Rebbe knew very well how to spell Balak.

He was teaching his disciple that when it comes to ahavat Yisra'el, we have to be a little more flexible and tolerant. If we require that all the stars—or letters in this case—align, we will never get anywhere. One who is too precise will never be a true *ohev yisra'el*; one must follow the heart.¹

Love of one's fellow Jew perhaps most often finds expression through the physical act of giving tzedakah. However, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, famous for conceptualizing certain mitzvot as having two aspects, one physical and the other attitudinal or emotional, said that tzedakah is properly fulfilled not only by handing over bills or signing a check, but by demonstrating ahavat Yisra'el in the form of genuine concern for those down on their luck and willingly opening one's hand to give.

A compelling halachic source for this idea can be found in the formulation of the Shulchan Aruch itself: "One must give tzedakah with a pleasant countenance, joyfully and wholeheartedly, empathizing with the plight of the poor person and offering words of comfort. If one gives with an angry or unpleasant countenance, then he loses his merit."² Apparently, one can actually lose the credit of performing this mitzvah if one's heart is not in the right place. The internal ahavat Yisra'el is essential.³

Among other reasons, tzedakah must be given out of love because it defines us. Unlike Bilam and his spiritual disciples, who have "an evil eye, an arrogant spirit, and an insatiable soul," Jews descend from Avraham, and so "have a good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul." The 4Talmud tells us that "Jews are compassionate, modest, and charitable."

Accordingly, the Rav categorized tzedakah as 5one of the mitzvot that "expresses a fundamental principle of Judaism, a characteristic trait of the Jewish people, and a firmly established foundation of its worldview." The Rambam went so far as to say that one must be more meticulous about tzedakah than about any other positive commandment, for the following reason:

Tzedakah is a mark (*siman*) of the righteous of our forefather Avraham's progeny.... The throne of Israel is established, and the true religion maintained, only through tzedakah.... Israel is redeemed only by the merit of tzedakah, as it is said, "Zion shall be redeemed through justice, and her returnees through tzedakah" (Isaiah 1:27).⁷

The Rav derived three aspects of tzedakah from this passage.

(1) The Rambam described tzedakah as a *siman*, a distinguishing mark, of the Jew. In the same way a *siman* is used to identify a lost object and return it to its owners, so does tzedakah make a Jew easy to spot among the sea of non-Jews. Avraham was the first prophet to teach the world about tzedakah and practice it, and he instructed his descendants to

do the same. When we engage in tzedakah, we reaffirm a link that is thousands of years old.⁸

(2) Tzedakah maintains “the true religion” because it generates a kiddush Hashem, a sanctification of God’s reputation in this world. “People are impressed by actions of this sort and begin, willy-nilly, to honor and esteem a nation devoted to tzedakah. The throne of Israel is established through tzedakah.”⁹

(3) The messianic ideal will come to fruition only through tzedakah because the messianic era marks the removal of wickedness, cruelty, and violence. Tzedakah constitutes an overabundance of kindness, compassion, and love. As the Rav beautifully wrote, “the justice through which Zion will be redeemed will be tempered by tzedakah and softened by kindness and compassion.”¹⁰

Holiday Giving

The act of giving charity takes on heightened significance during the holiday seasons:

(1) The High Holidays: We declare in our prayers on the High Holidays that tzedakah (together with repentance and prayer) can overturn an evil decree. The Rambam 11 incorporated charitable giving into the act of teshuvah (repentance): “As part of teshuvah the penitent ought to constantly cry out before God tearfully and pleadingly, and to perform tzedakah accordingly to his ability.” Why is tzedakah integral to teshuvah?

The Rav located the paradigm for this notion in the sin of the golden calf.

Note that after the sin, the nation was charged to donate to the construction of the Mishkan. An act of charity was called for in order to teach each person to be less selfish and self-absorbed, which is in fact the root of all sin. Therefore, whenever one does teshuvah for any sin, the negation of the ego, accomplished by giving tzedakah, is a desideratum. It has a purifying effect on man’s entire personality. 13

(2) Purim: The Rambam wrote that on Purim it is preferable to invest more in matanot le-eyonim (gifts to the poor) than in the festive meal or mishlo’ach manot (gifts to friends). The Rav posed a simple question: If there are 14 three obligatory mitzvot, how does the Rambam know that tzedakah takes precedence? He answered that the Rambam himself provided the solution. The Rambam said all three revolve around joy, which is the mood of the day. The greatest joy is generated and spread when those who have fallen on hard times are lifted up by a helping hand: There is no greater or glorious joy than to gladden the heart of the poor, orphans, widows, and converts. For one who brings joy to the heart of these unfortunate people is similar to the Shechinah (divine presence)...” 15

(3) Pesach: At the outset of the Seder we engage in the curious custom of yachatz, splitting the middle matzah in two. The Rav reminds us that the servitude of Egypt was not borne equally by all Israelites. According to the Sages, the entire tribe of Levi never experienced enslavement at all. This means that some had ready access to food while others did not. Enter

the custom of yachatz, which symbolizes the Jews of means breaking bread to share with the have-nots. This act of tzedakah, commemorated yearly on Pesach, demonstrates true ahavat Yisra’el. 16

A Dynasty of Charity The Soloveitchik family is legendary for its acts of tzedakah and kindness, and one of the most well-known stories involving the Rav’s great-grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik, shows how the tzedakah of Pesach was not only something to be commemorated. The story begins with a man knocking on Rabbi Soloveitchik’s door a few weeks before Pesach:

“Rabbi, I have a religious problem and I want your opinion.”

“Tell me your problem and I’ll try to help you.”

“Rabbi, am I permitted to use four cups of milk instead of wine for the Seder?”

“Why milk? Are you sick? Did the doctor forbid you to drink wine? If that is the reason, then there’s a very simple solution; cook some raisins and use the juice for the four cups instead of wine.”

“No, no, Rabbi,” answered the man, “I’m not sick. I can’t drink wine because I can’t afford it.”

“What do you do for a living?”

“I am a blacksmith, and I’ve had a very hard time making ends meet.”

The Rav called in his wife and said, “Tzirel, give this man twenty-five rubles.”

The man began to protest. “Rabbi, I didn’t come here to ask for charity. I came to inquire whether it is permissible to use milk instead of wine. Believe me, this is the first time in my life that I cannot afford to buy all the necessities for the holiday. I’m in a dilemma, I don’t know what to do.”

“I didn’t intend it as an act of charity,” replied Reb Yoshe Ber.

“I’m not a rich man who can afford to give away 17 twenty-five rubles. I mean it as a loan. When business improves, you’ll pay me back. Right now, take the money and hurry home to make proper preparations for the holiday.” [...]

After the man left, the Rebbetzin confronted her husband, saying, “Yoshe Ber, why did you have to give him twenty-five rubles? Wine doesn’t cost that much. Five rubles would have been more than enough...” “...Didn’t you hear him say he wanted to drink four cups of milk? That means he didn’t have money for meat. What kind of a Seder would his family enjoy?” 18

Here is the second, less known part of the story, as told by the Rav’s sister:

News travelled fast. The poor learned of the incident, and soon the rabbi’s house was swamped with needy people.... [...] Reb Yoshe Ber helped each and every one who came asking for assistance.

When all the transactions were finished and the Rav was alone with his family, his young son, Chaim’l, came over to him and said, “Father, you didn’t have to be so distressed when your acts of charity became public knowledge. It worked for the

best. It afforded you the opportunity to perform some more mitzvot. Don't our rabbis say that the highest reward for a mitzvah is when one mitzvah leads you to do another?" Touched by the wise words of his young son, Reb Yoshe ber replied, "My dear Chaim'l, may the Lord of the Universe always be with you and help you become not only a great Talmudic scholar, but also an outstanding sage in the performance of charity and merciful deeds."

This paternal blessing became a legacy of his son, Chaim. 19 Exploring the Rav's Insight

The Rav opined that there are two Hebrew words to describe a Jew's kindness that are not, in fact, synonymous: *merachem* and *rachaman*. The former denotes a person who does acts of kindness, but the term does not commit him emotionally. The latter starts with the emotion, describing someone as filled with compassion and *ahavat Yisrael*, and the *tzedakah* follows automatically. In the same way, it would not be fitting to describe the *Chafetz Chayim* as someone who acted righteously, but as a *tzaddik*. In both instances, the good quality forms part of the persona.

This is the level we strive to achieve in our *tzedakah* and *ahavat Yisrael*, because we are *rachmanim benei rachmanim*, a people whose compassion and communal responsibility are in our genes. In the Rav's case, his approach to *tzedakah* and *chesed* (kindness) can be easily traced all the way back to his illustrious ancestor, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. Rabbi Chaim's son Yitzchak wrote in the introduction to *Nefesh ha-Chayim* that his father constantly exhorted him to live his life dedicated to helping others, for this is the very purpose of man in this world.

1. Rabbi Yissocher Frand, "The Apter Rebbe Bends The Rules For Ahavas Yisrael," <https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5768-balak/> (accessed October 24, 2021). 2. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, 249:3. 3. See Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman, "Shiur #20: Tzedaka, the Heart of the Mitzvah," <https://torah.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-20tzedaka-heart-mitzva> (accessed October 24, 2021). This also accords with the Rambam's position that one ought to give pocket change on a consistent basis than to write a large check once. See his *Perush ha-Mishnah* on *Pirkei Avot*, 3:15. 4. *Pirkei Avot*, 5:19. *Rabbeinu Yonah* ad loc. cites proof for Avraham having a "good eye" from the verse which says, "Avraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and choice" (Genesis 18:7). Avraham slaughtered for each angel his own head of cattle and prepared tongue with mustard for each. 5. *Yevamot* 79a. 6. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Morality*, 123. 7. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Matenot Aniyim*, 10:1. 8. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Morality*, 124–125. 9. *Ibid.*, 127. 10. *Ibid.* 11. Right before *Kedushah* during the repetition of the *Mussaf Amidah*. 12. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, 2:4. 13. Rabbi Bernie Fox, "Tzedakah's Role in the Teshuvah Process," https://www.ou.org/holidays/how_much_tzedakah_should_we_give/ (accessed October 24, 2021). 14. *Mishneh Torah*,

Hilchot Megilah, 2:17. 15. *Ibid.* For the full analysis see Shurkin, *Harerei Kedem*, 337. 16. Goldscheider, *Night that Unites*, 64. 17. The Yiddish equivalent of Yosef Dov. 18. Soloveitchik Meiselman, *Soloveitchik Heritage*, 58–59. 19. *Ibid.*, 59–60. 20. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav*, 192.

https://blog.artscroll.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/artscroll-shabbos-newsletter_balak5784-pgs-1.pdf?utm_campaign=marketing&utm_content=marketing&utm_medium=email&utm_source=artscroll&utm_term=marketing

Not Abusing the Gift of Speech

Twerski on Chumash by **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski**
Rav Itzele of Ponevezh once attended a community issues were to be resolved. However, instead of discussing the pros and cons of the issues, a heated verbal battle erupted among the attendees. Some claimed that they were greater contributors to the community coffers and had the right to be heard first. Others claimed seniority, while yet others said that as officials of the community, they should speak first. Soon there was a clamor, with each one asserting his rights, and no one addressing the issues for which the meeting had been called.

R' Itzele pounded on the lectern and demanded silence. Out of respect for him, everyone was quiet. R' Itzele said, "I must tell you a story which explains a portion of the Torah. "The donkeys came before Hashem with a bitter complaint. 'Why have we been singled out from all animals to suffer? Wild animals roam the jungles freely, and have no master over them. Cows and sheep give their milk and wool, but are left at leisure all day to graze in the pasture. We alone are beasts of burden. We know no peace. Our masters place heavy loads on our backs and whip us if we don't move fast enough for them. It would only be fair for us to be able to speak to our masters and tell them when we are tired and not to overburden us.'

'Hashem said, 'You have a just complaint. I will give you the ability to speak.' "So Hashem gave Balaam's donkey the ability to speak. But instead of explaining to Balaam that there was an angel standing in her way, what did the donkey say? 'Am I not your she-donkey that you have ridden all your life until this day?' It started telling how important it was. Hashem then took the power of speech away. 'Donkeys who know nothing other than to assert their importance do not deserve to speak.' "

We would do well to remember R' Itzele's parable.

from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Jul 18, 2024, 8:14 PM subject: Stalin Vs. Schneersohn - Essay by Rabbi YY
Stalin Vs. Schneersohn -- 97 Years Later: Who Won?
Rabbi YY Jacobson

Dedicated by Cynthia Carsley wishing her dear parents Moshe ben Tzirel and Naomi bas Esther blessings for good health.

A Vain Battle

If there was ever a battle fought in vain, this was it. Or at least, so it seemed at the time.

The year is 1924. Vladimir Lenin, the father of the communist revolution, is dead; over 900,000 people pass through the Hall of Columns during the four days and nights that Lenin's body lay exposed to the public.

Josef Stalin succeeds him as the new leader of the Soviet Union. During the following thirty years, he would murder 50 million of his own people. Jews and Judaism would be one of his primary targets. He sets up a special government organization, the Yevsektzye, to ensure that Russian Jewry in its millions embraces the new ethos of Communism, introducing a paradise constructed of bullets and gulags. Stalin would rule with an iron fist till his death in March 1953, when four million people would gather in Red Square to bid farewell to the tyrant still revered and beloved by much of his nation and by many millions the world over.

At his home in Leningrad (today Petersburg), a 44-year-old rabbi, heir to some of the great Jewish thinkers and leaders of Russian Jewry, summons nine young disciples. He offers them an opportunity most would refuse: to take responsibility for the survival of Judaism in the communist Soviet Union; to ensure that Jewish life and faith would survive the hellish darkness of Stalin's regime. He wants them to fight—in his words—"till the last drop of blood."

They embrace the mission. He gives his hand to each of them as a sign that they are accepting an oath, one that would transform their destiny forever. "I will be the tenth, he says; together we have a minyan"...

An Underground Revolution

The nine men were dispatched throughout the country. With assistance from similar-minded colleagues, they created an impressive underground network of Jewish activity, which included Jewish schools, synagogues, mikvaot (ritual baths used by Jewish woman for spiritual feminine reinvigoration), adult Torah education, Yeshivot (academies for Torah learning for students), Jewish textbooks, providing rabbis for communities, teachers for schools, etc. Over the 1920s and 1930s, these individuals built six hundred (!) Jewish underground schools throughout the U.S.S.R (1). Many of them last for only a few weeks or months. When the KGB (the secret Russian police) discovered a school, the children were expelled, the teacher was arrested. A new one was opened elsewhere, usually in a cellar or on a roof.

One of the nine young men was sent to Georgia. There were dozens of mikvaot there, all shut down by the communists who buried them in sand and gravel. This young man decided to do something radical. He falsified a letter written supposedly by the KGB headquarters in Moscow, instructing the local offices in Georgia to open two mikvaot within 24 hours.

The local officials were deceived. Within a day, two mikvaot were open. Several months later, when they discovered the lie, they shut them down again.

And so it went. A mohel (the person performing the mitzvah of circumcision) was arrested, and another one was dispatched to serve the community; a yeshiva was closed, and another one opened elsewhere; a synagogue was destroyed and another one opened its portals in secrecy. It is a chapter in Jewish history unbeknownst to most.

But it sure seemed like a lost battle. Here was an individual rabbi, with a small group of pupils, staging an underground rebellion against a mighty empire that numbered in the hundreds of millions, and aspired to dominate the world. It was like an infant wrestling a giant, an ant attempting to defeat a military tank. The situation was hopeless.

Finally, in 1927—ninety-three years ago—they lost their patience with this man. The rabbi behind the counter-revolutionary work was arrested and sentenced to death by a firing squad. Foreign pressure and nothing less than a miracle convinced the KGB to alter the sentence to ten years in exile. It was then converted to three years, and then—quite unbelievable in the Soviet Regime where clergy and laymen alike were murdered like flies—he was completely exonerated. The 12th and 13th of the Hebrew month of Tamuz (this year it is July 18-19), mark the 97th anniversary since he was liberated from Stalin's death sentence in 1927.

The individual behind the spiritual mutiny was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950), who became the leader of Chabad in 1920, after the passing of his father. He selected nine of his young pupils to wage battle with him. The one sent to Georgia, falsifying the KGB document, was my grandfather, Simon Yakabashvili, my father's father (1900-1953). He, together with hundreds of his colleagues, Chassidim throughout the Soviet Union, was arrested in 1938, tortured mercilessly and given a 25-year sentence in the Gulag. Most of his eight colleagues who accepted the oath never made it out of Stalin's hell. They perished in the Soviet Union. (My grandfather, Reb Simon, made it out of the USSR, but died several years later at the age of 53 in Toronto. He died on 2 Tamuz, 5713-1953, leaving behind there young sons, Gershon, Bezalel and Sholom. My father died in 2005, my uncle Bezalel died seven years ago. Their mother, Freida, passed on in 1954, one year after her husband. She was 44. One child remains, may he enjoy many long and healthy years).

Investing in Eternity

More than nine decades have passed. This passage of time gives us the opportunity to answer the question: Who won? Stalin or Schneerson?

one century ago, Marx's socialism and Lenin's communism heralded a new era for humanity. Its seemingly endless power and brutality seemed unbreakable.

Yet one individual stood up, a man who would not allow the awesome war machine of Mother Russia to blur his vision, to eclipse his clarity. In the depths of his soul, he was aware that history had an undercurrent often invisible to most but discernible to students of the long and dramatic narrative of our people. He knew with full conviction that evil might thrive but it will die; yet goodness, holiness, G-dliness—embodied in Torah and Mitzvos—are eternal.

And he chose to invest in eternity.

He probably did not know how exactly it would work out in the end. I am not sure he believed he would survive. But he knew that his mission in life was to sow seeds, though the trees were being felled one by one.

Cynics scoffed at him; close friends told him he was making a tragic mistake. Even many of his religious colleagues were convinced that he was wasting his time and energy fighting an impossible war. They either fled the country or maintained a low profile. Some great rabbis at the time felt he was trying to do the impossible and it was futile.

But more than 90 years later, this giant and what he represented have emerged triumphant. Today, despite uneasy times in Russia, in the republics of the former Soviet Union stand hundreds of synagogues, Jewish day schools, yeshivot, mikvaot, Jewish community centers. Since communism fell, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (the son-in-law of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe who was liberated in 1927) sent hundreds of ambassadors to create a Jewish renaissance. They span the entire length and breadth of the country, from Siberia to Tashkent; from Tbilisi to Krasnoyarsk. Over the last 30 years, they have built more than one hundred (!) full-time Jewish day schools, in which more than 100,000 Jewish children received a Jewish Torah education. As this summer season began, dozens of Jewish day camps opened up throughout the former Soviet Union with tens of thousands of Jewish children who will enjoy a blissful summer coupled with the celebration of Jewish life.

I have a cousin, Rabbi Yerachmiel Garelick, who serves as the Chabad ambassador to Western Siberia. Jewish women had to travel for seven hours to visit a mikvah. He just completed building a magnificent mikvah in Tuman, Siberia!

And the Chabad couple in Birobidzhan, located on the Trans-Siberian Railway, near the China-Russia border, where Stalin wanted to exile three million Russian Jews, opened a Glat kosher restaurant there.

On Chanukah, a large menorah stood tall in the Kremlin, casting the glow of Chanukah on the grounds where Stalin walked with Berya and Yezhov. On Lag Baomer (a Jewish holiday), thousands of Jewish children with kippot on their heads marched the streets of Moscow with signs proclaiming, "Hear oh Israel... G-d is One." Jewish life is bustling in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, Uzbekistan, etc.

Visiting Russia a number of years ago, Russia's Chief Rabbi, Berel Lazar, pointed to a massive Jewish school he built in

Moscow stretching over a full block. "Right across from here were some of the main offices of the KGB, where the orders to decimate Judaism came from," he said.

Across the street was a massive Jewish museum, one of the nicest I have ever seen, attracting thousands of weekly visitors, and telling the story of the Jewish people and their heritage.

I then entered, two streets over, the Marina Rashtze synagogue in Moscow, a massive and beautiful 8-story structure.

Hundreds of Jews were praying and studying Torah.

Comrade Stalin is dead; communism has faded away as hopelessly irrelevant and destructive. The sun of the nations is today a clod of darkness. The ideology of the Soviet Empire which declared "Lenin has not died and Stalin will not die. He is eternal," is now a mockery. Stalin and Lenin are as dead as one can be. But the Mikvaot built by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1927, they are still here, from Siberia to Moscow, to Tashkent. If you will visit Russia this coming Shabbos, I am not sure you will find anybody celebrating the life and vision of Stalin, or even Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Andropov. But you will find tens of thousands of Jews celebrating the liberation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1927 and the narrative of one holy man's triumph over one of the greatest mass-murderers in human history, sharing his vision, committing themselves to continue saturating the world with the light of Torah and Mitzvos.

So on this day, the 12th of Tamuz, lift your glasses and say L'chayim! L'chayim to a Rebbe who inspired such heroism in so many disciples, many of them who paid the ultimate price. L'chayim to the incredible Jews of Russia who maintained the embers burning for seven decades, and then—when the opportunity came—fanned them into glowing flames.

L'chayim to my dear Zeide, Reb Simon, whom I never met but whose life story is engraved in the core of my heart.

Today, we have many battles to fight, and plenty of darkness to conquer. Our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and Russia are enduring a terrible war. Our eternal homeland is under attack.

It is easy to become cynical or depressed, leading to emotional paralysis. But our greatest leaders always knew better. They never allowed the mask of evil to define the narrative of history; they ensured that another story would dominate our imaginations and actions.

So can we.

1) This figure was given to me by Rabbi Sholom Ber Levin, chief librarian of the Central Lubavitch Library in Brooklyn, NY.

<https://vinnews.com/2024/07/16/rav-yitzchok-feigelstock-zatzal-on-parshas-balak/>

Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock zatzal on Parshas Balak

July 16, 2024

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

by Rabbi Yair Hoffman for the Sefas Tamim Foundation
This Dvar Torah was adapted from shmuessin found in the newly published Sefer, "Yehge Chochma" Vol. II – The

Mussar Shmuessim of HaGaon HaRav Yitzchok Feigelstock zt"l of the Long Beach Yeshiva. Rav Yeruchem Olshin Shlita told this author that his own mehalech in Shmuessim was heavily influenced by Rav Feigelshtok when he gave Mussar Vaadim and Chaburo in BMG.

“And he [Balak] sent messengers to Bilaam Ben B’or (BaMidbar 22:5)

The Sifrei (veZos HaBracha 357) cited by Rashi darshans, “While no Navi arose in Israel like Moshe Rabbeinu – one did arise among the gentiles with his power of prophecy – and that is Bilaam ben B’or.” This, however, begs the question: How could it be that someone so vile and lowly, so steeped in depraved behavior (See Sanhedrin 105) could have a level of prophecy equal to Kla Yisroel’s greatest prophet?

Furthermore, the Rambam (Yesodei Torah Chapter 7) writes that prophecy can only reside in someone who is both brilliant and who has mastered his character traits.

Rashi answers the question somewhat when he explains that he did not wish the nations of the world to say, “Well if we had a prophet like Moshe, then we would have also sought growth and truth..” and, therefore, Hashem gave the nations such a prophet. However, that may address the issue of Hashem overlooking the requirement of mastering character traits, but, nonetheless, Bilaam did have the intellectual brilliance that was necessary to possess prophecy. Why then did he not see so many obvious truths? How could he have thought that there are times when Hashem does not know all?

We must perforce say that there is another factor that prevents a person from seeing truths – even obvious ones. Let us explore what that other factor is.

Bilaam bragged to Hashem about the fact that Balak sent for him. Rashi explains his intent was as follows: “You may not consider me important, but the king of Moav certainly does.” This is the height of audacity and Chutzpah – taking back in such a way with the Creator of the world.

It is clear that the other factor is self-absorbance and hubris. Hubris can blind and obscure truth from even the brightest of people. Examples abound. Edison was known as one of the greatest inventors in the world, and his self-absorption caused him to be blind to the limitations of DC power which he advocated for, while the rival AC power picked up speed. Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Verner Heisenberg, was already a winner of the Nobel Prize and yet he failed to properly understand how little “heavy water” was needed to produce a nuclear bomb. This was something that even a first year physics student can calculate.

In Pirkei Avos (5:19), students of Avrohom are described as very humble, whereas students of Bilaam are described as haughty and filled with hubris. There is a grave lesson that can be learned here. We must actively seek to avoid any form of hubris if we wish to live a life of everyday emes.

To Subscribe to a weekly Parsha Sheet highlighting Emes please email yairhoffman2@gmail.com with the word subscribe in the subject line.

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com> to: Beth Sholom Landau Bill <latemaariv@bethsholom.org>, Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com> date: Jul 18, 2024, 9:59 PM subject: **Potomac Torah Study Center: Devrei Torah for Shabbat Balak 5784**

Of all the stories in the Torah, one of the best remembered is our parsha, which includes the comic incident of Bilaam’s donkey – an animal that sees what Bilaam cannot see and speaks sense when Bilaam acts like a blind and arrogant jerk. Similarly, I vividly remember a television show of sixty years ago, Mr. Ed, a talking horse that was a comic treat for several years. Talking animals are easy to remember. However, why is Balak in the Torah, and what are we to learn from this parsha, in which no Jews appear until the final few pasookim? Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that Tanach contains ten different episodes in which an individual takes a journey by donkey – and in none of these incidents does the individual realize the purpose of his trip. The lesson in these stories is not the donkey. As Rabbi Brander observes, we cannot control what will happen at the end of our journeys. We can only control our integrity and values. Bilaam tries to manipulate God to curse B’Nai Yisrael and benefit Moab and Midian, despite God’s repeated messages that He will not permit Bilaam to curse the Jews. Bilaam goes to Moab despite Hashem’s order not to do so, but God remains in control and ensures that Bilaam’s attempts to curse turn out to be blessings. Indeed, Bilaam’s blessings are so beautiful that the Rabbis would have included them in the Shema if they were not so lengthy.

The story of Balak and Bilaam connects to episodes early in the Torah, as Rabbi David Fohrman discusses (alephbeta.org).

Balak’s concern that the huge population of Jews covers the land as far as he can see reminds us of Paro’s concern of the swarming Jews who cover the land and might threaten the existence of Egypt. Paro and Balak both seek to conquer the Jews. Bilaam’s journey, including rising early, preparing his donkey, and taking two assistants, parallels Avraham’s steps setting out to take Yitzhak to sacrifice at the Akeidah. The blessings from Bilaam’s mouth reinforce the blessings that God gives to Avraham and that the angel gives him after the Akeidah. The Mishnah recognizes that we are to compare Avraham and Bilaam (see Pirkei Avot 5:22 in the Art Scroll Ashkenaz Siddur – numbering varies slightly across editions). Rabbi Haim Ovadia discusses lessons from the Talmud to conclude that evil prayers do not work. God retains the ability to control events and frustrate attempts to pray for evil. Rabbi Ovadia concludes that our goal should be to pray to fulfill Hashem’s mission by making the world a better place, one prayer at a time and with as many good actions as possible.

Rabbi Yehoshua Singer gives a very similar message in his Dvar Torah.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z”l, asks why we Jews generate such hatred that vicious anti-Semitism erupts frequently over the course of history. After Hitler murdered a third of all the Jews living in the 1930s, with horrific concentration camps and cruel acts on many Jews, who would expect that within the lifetime of many of the survivors we would encounter an explosion of anti-Semitism all over the world? Jews represent not quite 0.2 percent of the world population. The United Nations probably spends more time and money condemning Jews and supporting Arab hatred than on anything else. Rabbi Sacks observes that Jews have generally not been able to assimilate into other cultures because of anti-Semitism. Both Orthodox rabbis and secular Jewish scholars agree that whenever there is malaise in a prevailing culture, anti-Semitism arises to provide a convenient scapegoat. The difference now versus in the 1930s and 1940s is that we now have Israel, the one country that is always ready to accept Jews.

Rabbi Brander frequently reminds us that we Jews must come together to remain strong and to keep Israel strong. This week he discusses the difficulty Israel has in finding acceptable candidates for the Chief Rabbi position (or two positions if one Ashkenaz and one Sephardic). Should these positions remain Haredi or represent a broader consensus of the Orthodox position (and also be more open to non-Orthodox groups)? Since I am neither a rabbi nor an Israeli, I shall not express a position on the issue. However, I share Rabbi Brander’s wish for more unity among our people. Our goal as Jews should be to do our part to make the world a better place – and coming together with our fellow Jews is an important part of this mandate.

Unity among all Jews and support for our fellow Jews throughout the world were two very important goals of my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah and Alan

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org> to: rabbizweig@torah.org date: Jul 17, 2024, 4:02 PM subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - A Different Kind Of Friend **Parshas Balak**

A Different Kind Of Friend

“He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov, and saw no perversity in Yisroel. Hashem his G-d is with him, and the friendship of the King is in him.” (23:21)

The commentators translate “teruas melech” as “the friendship of the King”, “teruas” being from the word “rayus” – “friendship”. Rashi explains the verse as Balaam expressing the futility of any attempt to curse Bnei Yisroel, for Hashem does not scrutinize their iniquity nor criticize them for their shortcomings, even when they provoke Him by maliciously violating His word[1]. Why would not criticizing a person for his wrongdoing be an expression of friendship? On the contrary, a true friend is not afraid to criticize, for that is the manner in which he expresses his concern for his friend’s well-being.

In Parshas Kedoshim we find the commandment “ve’ahavta lera’yacha kamo’cha” – “you should love your friend as you love yourself[2].” Translating “rayacha” as “neighbor” is incorrect. Rayacha is derived from the word “rayus” – “friendship”. From this verse we can derive that in the hierarchy of relationships, love is greater than friendship, for we are commanded to love a person who already is our friend: “ve’ahavta lera’yacha”. In the last of the Sheva Berachos, the seven blessings established by the Rabbis as part of the wedding ceremony, we thank Hashem for the various levels of relationships which can be attained by the bride and groom. Presumably, we give thanks in ascending order. Here we say “ahava ve’achva shalom verayus” – “love, brotherhood, harmony, and friendship”. The implication is that the relationship of friendship transcends that of love. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

In his commentary that introduces Pirkei Avos, the Shmoneh Perakim, the Rambam cites Aristotle who defines various levels of friendship. The most common type are friends with whom a person shares experiences. Although he may enjoy their company, a person still maintains a facade, unwilling to present his vulnerabilities to them, for fear that they may use this information against him. Very rarely, do we find a friend in whom we place our complete trust and for whom we are willing to let down our guard and share our insecurities. This only occurs if we sense that this friend is completely dedicated to our growth and his actions are motivated by his concern for our best interests.

There is no contradiction between the verse in Parshas Kedoshim and the terminology used at the Sheva Berachos. The verse is teaching us that we should learn to love our friends who fall into the first category. The Rabbis bless the married couple that their relationship should transcend from love to the friendship of the second category.

It is difficult to accept criticism graciously, especially when the criticism emanates from an injured party. The reason for this is that we convince ourselves that the criticism is not being levied because the person cares for us, rather because he is an injured party. This is only true of a friend from the first category. However, if the criticism is given by a person who we know to have our best interests at heart, we can accept that the rebuke is meant to prevent us from harmful behavior. Rashi's interpretation of the verse is thus: It is because of our "rayus" – friendship with Hashem that He does not criticize us for what we have done to Him. Hashem is willing to overlook the hurt that we cause Him. It is only for the damage which we cause ourselves that Hashem rebukes and punishes us, for Hashem's only agenda is our best interests.

1.23:21

2.19:18

"Who has counted the dust of Yaakov..." (23:10) In his second explanation of this verse, Rashi offers the Midrashic interpretation: Who can count the agricultural mitzvos that Bnei Yisroel perform, for they are so numerous[1]. The Maharal asks why it is particularly the agricultural mitzvos that are drawn to Balaam's attention[2]?

On the third day of creation Hashem instructs that there should be "aytz pri oseh pri" – "fruit trees yielding fruit[3]".

However, when the trees are actually created, we find that the verse states "v'aytz oseh pri" – "trees yielding fruit[4]." Rashi comments that Hashem commanded the earth to produce trees which were edible themselves and had the same taste as the fruit that they yielded. However, the earth produced trees which were inedible themselves, but yielded edible fruit.

Therefore, when man was cursed for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Hashem cursed the earth as well:

"Accursed is the ground[5,6]." What is the notion of the earth disobeying Hashem's will? Furthermore, why is the punishment of the earth delayed until Adam's punishment?

Clearly, the earth cannot rebel against Hashem's wishes, rather Hashem must have programmed that instead of the earth producing trees in their perfect state, i.e. having the same taste as their fruit, the earth brought forth an imperfect product. The question that must then be addressed is why would Hashem create the illusion that one of His creations rebelled against Him?

Since man is created from the earth, as is verified by his name "Adam" – "from the adama (the ground)[7]," it is the very perception that the ground chose not to follow the will of Hashem that gives man his ability of free choice, the ability to either conform to or rebel against the will of Hashem. Since man's ability to sin stemmed from being created out of the earth, it is only once he does sin that the earth is punished as well. Punishing the earth is a furthering of the illusion that the earth has its independence and the ability to choose not to conform to the will of Hashem.

The ultimate purpose of mitzvos which involve the use of the earth is to take the element in creation that appears to be the most separate from Hashem and has the greatest expression of Hashem distancing Himself from the world, and reconnect it back to Hashem. It is specifically those elements which appear most alienated from Hashem that when connected back to Him reveal His glory in the greatest manner. It is this ability that Bnei Yisroel have to take that which is cursed and turn it into beracha – blessing, i.e. being reconnected back to Hashem, which impacts upon Balaam. Balaam recognizes that Bnei Yisroel view that which is cursed as an opportunity to reveal Hashem's glory, and not as an obstacle. Therefore, ultimately Bnei Yisroel will be impervious to his curses.

1.23:10 2.Gur Arye ibid 3.1:11 4.1:12 5.1:11 6.3:17

7.1:7

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <contact@michalhorowitz.com>

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Be of the Students of Avraham

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Balak, the Torah tells us of Balak, the king of Moav, who feared the approaching hired the famous seer, Bilaam, to come and curse the Jews. King Balak was certain that the power of Bilaam's curses would be stronger than the power of Balak's swords, and through these curses, he and his nation would be able to bring ruination, and defeat, upon the nation of Israel. It took a number of delegations, and many persuasions, to convince Bilaam to go with the officers of Moav to King Balak, but after much deliberations, Bilaam finally accepted the job.

Bilaam was self-centered and greedy, and desired only the most honorable and important, high-level government representatives to come hire him and accompany him back to Moav (Bamidbar 22:13 with Rashi), as well as vast amounts of gold and silver (ibid, v.18) as payment for the job.

Though he tried repeatedly to curse the Jews, ultimately, all of his curses turned to blessings, as G-d puts words into his mouth, for he was a mere spokesman for the Almighty (ironically, he was no different than his donkey, a lowly animal, that spoke to him on his journey, who was also simply a messenger of G-d - ibid, v.28-30).

The Sages tell us הִזָּ [יֵט] כֹּל מִי שִׁישׁ בּוֹ שְׁלוּשָׁה דְּבָרִים הֵלְלוּ, הִרִי זֶה מִתְּלִמְדֵיּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם; וְכֹל מִי שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ שְׁלוּשָׁה דְּבָרִים הֵלְלוּ, הִרִי זֶה מִתְּלִמְדֵיּוֹ שֶׁל בְּלַעַם: תְּלִמְדֵיּוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם--עֵין טוֹבָה, וְנִפְשׁ אֲבֵל תְּלִמְדֵיּוֹ שֶׁל בְּלַעַם--עֵין רַעָה, וְנִפְשׁ ... ;שְׁפֵלָה, וְרוּחַ נְמוּכָה רַחְבָּה, וְרוּחַ גְּבוּהָה

Whoever possesses the following three traits is of the students of our father Avraham; and whoever possesses the opposite three traits is of the students of the wicked Balaam. The students of our father Avraham have a good eye, a meek spirit and a humble soul. The disciples of the wicked Balaam have

an evil eye, a haughty spirit and a broad soul (Pirkei Avos 5:22).

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, in his commentary to Pirkei Avos, teaches, “The life of Avraham was characterized by these virtues: ayin tovah, he truly loved his fellow-men and therefore he could rejoice without envy or reserve in their every good fortune; he was modest (אִיִּם וְעוֹלָם וְעוֹלָם), and he was undemanding (אִיִּם וְעוֹלָם וְעוֹלָם). These qualities immediately came to the fore, when Avraham left his father’s house, and gave up all the pleasures, riches, and inhospitable unknown; all in order to advance the comforts, and honors of home to go out into the strange welfare of his fellow-men... The picture of his long and trial-laden life shows no trace whatever of conduct at variance with these noble traits.

“In striking contrast to this, we behold the arrogance, the insatiable ambition and the greed of the malicious Bilaam who was ready to pronounce a curse over an entire people. We cannot find in Bilaam’s character sketch even one stroke that might mitigate this unsavory picture in the gallery of history.

“The disciples of Avraham love their fellow-men, they are modest, humble, and utterly untainted by envy. These sterling qualities not only open for them to portals of bliss in the world to come, but give them serenity and happiness even here on earth, regardless of the lack of material wealth and pleasures, and the burden of trials and privation that life may bring. Their measure of calamities seems small in their eyes, and the happiness of others which they create, promote, and observe affords them a source of joy which the disciples of Bilaam cannot possibly surmise. As for the disciples of Bilaam, their malice, arrogance, and insatiable greed and ambition not only make it impossible for them to walk upon the road to salvation in the world to come, but also keep them from finding one moment’s true contentment, even in the midst of their abundant riches and pleasures. Any joy, honor or prosperity that comes to others is a bitter drop in their cup of joy and whatever they may already have achieved loses all value in their eyes when they contemplate those of their desires that are still unfulfilled... The world to come is closed to them and the happiness possible in this world is truly lost to them as well” (Chapters of the Fathers, Commentary by R’ Samson Rafael Hirsch, Feldheim, p.92-93).

We - Am Yisrael - are the children of Avraham Avinu. To be, not only the children of Avraham, but of the students of Avraham, is to learn from his ways, go in his path, and emulate his actions. To be a Jew is to embody the middos of a generous and kind eye towards others, to be able to ‘fagin’, and rejoice with them, in their success. To be a Jew is to be modest and and think about the well-being of others in life; not only what are my needs, but what are the needs of another Jew? And to be a Jew is to have a undemanding spirit, and be content with what Hashem sends our way in life. “Who is a

wealthy person? One who is satisfied and happy with his portion” (Avos 4:1).

Those with a negative, evil and stingy eye, a haughty spirit, and a broad soul, are of the students of Bilaam.

We live in a world that abounds with the students of Bilaam. An even cursory glance at world events, at societies, and at the enemies that arise to destroy us, may their names be blotted out, reminds us that we are living in a world of the Bilaam’s of the modern age. The evil eye of destruction abounds, may G-d save us: the haughty spirit of each man wanting what is best for himself, even at the expense of his fellow man is ravaging our world; and the broad and greedy soul of governments and many world leaders, and their followers, brings destruction upon many innocents.

Every Jew is a child of Avraham. Every day we must - each of us - make a personal choice anew to be of the students of Avraham - to learn from his ways and to walk in his path. We must see each other - every other Jew who is part of Am Yisrael - with a kind and loving ayin tova (good eye); we must strive to work for the benefit and welfare of our families, communities, nation and Land; and we must be content with what G-d sends our way, and appreciate all the bounty in our personal - and national - lives.

Perhaps then, the curses of our enemies today - the Bilaam’s of the modern time - will be turned into blessings, as happened with the Bilaam of old.

And then we will truly merit to see the fruition of the blessing of “mah tova o’halecha Yaakov, mish’ke’nosecha Yisrael” (Bamidbar 24:5) - the beauty and goodness in the Jewish home, in our batei kenesiyot and batei midrashos, and in our every dwelling place where the Shechina longs to reside.

from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>
to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

May I Divine?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Skipping the Thirteenth Floor “May a frum builder skip the number 13 when naming the floors of a building?”

Question #2: Snakes and Ladders “Is there a halachic source that one should change his plans if he sees a snake when he leaves on a trip?”

Question #3: Monkey Business As I was preparing this article, Reuvein asked me the following question: “I am in the middle of negotiating the acquisition of a business. On the way to the meeting, a quirk accident happened. Should I interpret this as a reason to avoid the deal?” Introduction: Several mitzvos of the Torah prohibit different practices used to predict the future. Many of these are mentioned in parshas Kedoshim, including the prohibitions against ov and yide’oni, both ancient methods of necromancy (Vayikra 20:27), and the commandments: Lo senachashu velo se’oneinu (Vayikra 19:26), which I will translate as Do not make use of omens and do not divine times.

These four prohibitions are repeated together with three similar ones in parshas Shoftim (Devorim 18:10-11): *Lo yimatza'ei becha... koseim kesamim, me'onein, umenacheish umechasheif... vesho'eil ov veyide'oni vedoreish el hameisim*, "There shall not be found among you... a soothsayer, a diviner of times, an interpreter of omens or a sorcerer... or one who asks of ov or of yide'oni or one who consults the dead."

Subsequently, in parshas Shoftim, the Torah commands *Tamim tih'yeh im Hashem Elokecha*, "You shall be whole-hearted with Hashem, your G-d" (Devorim 18:13). This means that we should not allow our relationship with Hashem to become diffused by placing confidence or decision-making in the hands of superstitions or worse.

Practicing omens -- in Hebrew, *nichush* or *nachash* -- includes taking action or avoiding taking action because of superstitious reasons. Divination, *me'onein*, can be defined as "attempting to foretell future events by use of supernatural powers," although, as we will soon see, the Torah's prohibition is more inclusive. According to the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:37), all of these practices are forbidden because they are similar to idol worship.

The basics of the prohibition of *nichush* are that one should not use methods that are outside of Torah to try to determine whether one should pursue a particular course of action. What exactly is included within these prohibitions? As we will see shortly, the rules here are not at all obvious and, indeed, are often disputed by the rishonim.

First source A beraisa, quoted by the Gemara (Sanhedrin 65b-66a), presents the following list of situations that are prohibited because of *nichush*. In each of these, someone was planning a course of action, perhaps leaving on a business trip or similar mission, and then, because something occurred, he changed his plans. The situations listed are:

- His bread fell out of his mouth. - He dropped his walking stick. - His son called him from behind (presumably as he was leaving the house). - He heard the call of a raven. - A deer crossed his path. - He saw a snake on his right side or a fox on his left. Apparently, during the time of the Gemara, there were superstitious beliefs that any of these events bode poorly for the results of the trip. One can compare this to contemporary superstitions about black cats or the number thirteen. This Gemara teaches that one may not base a decision on an omen or other factor that bears no rational influence on the planned course of action. In all of the above cases, someone who changes his plans because he feels that he has just seen a bad omen violates a Torah law.

Snakes and ladders At this point, we can answer one of our opening questions: "Is there a halachic source that one should change his plans if he sees a snake when he leaves on a trip?" Quite the contrary, there is a halachic source prohibiting changing one's plans under these circumstances.

Should I pay my taxes? The above-quoted passage of Gemara continues with several other applications of this prohibition:

Someone requests from the tax collector, "Don't begin your collecting with me," because he feels that this is a bad omen. Similarly, someone who postpones paying a debt at the beginning of the week or the month, because of a belief that this will portend a bad week or month, also violates the prohibition of *nichush*.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 66a) concludes its discussion there by quoting a different beraisa: The Rabbis taught, "Do not use omens or lucky times -- such as those who use omens of weasels (in Hebrew, *chuldos*), birds or stars." (Although our text of the Gemara says fish, the Rambam, Commentary to Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 4:7, and other rishonim cite stars as the correct version.) Similarly, a person who changed his plans because a black cat crossed his path has violated a prohibition of the Torah. Someone who knowledgeably does this would be invalid as a witness for a wedding, because he has violated a *lo saaseh* of the Torah.

No causal connection The Ran (Sanhedrin ad loc.) explains that *nichush* is prohibited when there is no logical causal connection between the event that transpired and the plans that one is changing. The only reason one is changing his plans is because of a belief that the events (the bread falling, the deer crossing the path, etc.) are meant to foretell something.

On the other hand, it is permitted to change your plans because of a logical reason. For example, someone planning a trip who sees thunderclouds on the horizon may change his travel plans for the day because it appears that it will rain, making travel unpleasant or even potentially dangerous. Since this is a logical reason to postpone his trip, it has nothing to do with the prohibition against *nichush* (Ran). Similarly, it is permitted to follow a procedure that can be shown to have medical benefit, as we will now explain (Moreh Nevuchim; Meiri, Shabbos 67a).

Locust eggs and fox teeth The Mishnah (Shabbos 60a) rules that an ill person may wear a *ke'meia*, an amulet, whose efficacy is established, into or through a *reshus harabim*, a public area on Shabbos. For someone ill, this is considered the halachic equivalent to wearing an ornament or a garment (Rashi ad loc.). A later Mishnah (Shabbos 67a) cites a dispute whether one is permitted to walk through a public area on Shabbos while wearing the egg of a grasshopper, the tooth of a fox or the nail used to hang someone from a gallows. The tanna who permits this considers these items halachically the same as an amulet whose efficacy is established. The tanna who forbids wearing these items prohibits doing so even on a weekday, because he considers this to be a form of *nichush* (see Rashi). The Gemara concludes that, since the medical value of this treatment is demonstrable, wearing it does not violate the laws prohibiting *nichush*. We rule according to this tanna.

Dispute among rishonim At this point, we need to introduce a dispute concerning the extent of what the Torah prohibited. The precise question is whether the Torah prohibits being

influenced only by prevalent superstitious practices, or whether any method of foretelling the future not firmly grounded in Torah is forbidden. In other words, we know that the Torah provided methods to foretell the future by consulting the urim vetumim worn by the kohen gadol or via information gained from a prophet. These are certainly permitted. There is, however, a dispute regarding whether one may create one's own method as a basis to decide whether to proceed with a specific course of action. In the Rambam's opinion, anything that one would rely upon to base one's decision or plan of action is prohibited (Hilchos Avodas Kochavim 11:5). However, according to the Radak (Shemuel I 14:9), only practices that are based on superstition, sorcery, idol worship or similar nefarious bases are prohibited. It is permitted to do something as a sign or symbol, because this strengthens one's resolve. (See also Ra'avad, Hilchos Avodas Kochavim 11:4, 5, who also follows this approach.) Shortly, I will show a few examples of this dispute.

Dependent on this dispute will be two very different ways of understanding the following passage of Gemara (Chullin 95b), quoting the great amora, Rav: "Any nachash that is unlike what was performed by Eliezer, the slave of Avraham, and unlike that performed by Yonasan, the son of Shaul, is not a nachash." Prior to presenting the two approaches to understanding this Gemara, let us examine the two events quoted.

The story of Eliezer When Eliezer was on his mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, the Torah describes that upon his arrival in the city of Nachor, he asked Hashem for a specific sign to identify the woman he was seeking. Eliezer prayed for G-d to send him the chosen woman on the following basis: Should he ask her to provide him with a bit of water, and she would respond, "I will also provide water for your camels," this girl is to be Yitzchak's bride, without any other questions or research (Bereishis 24:14). According to some rishonim, what Eliezer did qualifies as an act of nichush, since he made his action totally dependent on an outside factor.

The story of Yonasan The other example mentioned by the Gemara is that of Yonasan, the crown prince son of King Shaul. At a time when the Jews had almost no weapons and were the underdog in an incredibly lopsided war against the Pelishtim, Yonasan, accompanied only by his armor-bearer, advanced towards a garrison of Pelishtim soldiers. Yonasan told his armor-bearer, "If they say to us, 'wait until we reach you,' we should remain in our place and not advance towards them. However, if they say, 'come forward to us,' then we should attack, because this is our sign that Hashem has given them over to our hands (Shemuel I 14:8-10)." This, notwithstanding that Yonasan and his armor-bearer were only two attacking an entire garrison!

Why did the Gemara refer to what Yonasan did as an act of nachash, divining?

We find a major dispute among the rishonim how to interpret the words of the Gemara, "Any nachash that is unlike what was performed by Eliezer, the slave of Avraham, and unlike that performed by Yonasan, the son of Shaul, is not a nachash." Most early rishonim (Rashi, Rambam, Tosafos) understand the Gemara to mean that anyone who follows an approach similar to what Eliezer or Yonasan did has violated the prohibition of nichush. These rishonim contend that other than prophecy or the use of the urim vetumim, using events over which I have no control to determine my course of action is included under the prohibition of nichush.

Of course, the obvious problem with this approach is that if these actions indeed violate the prohibition of nichush, why were Eliezer and Yonasan permitted to perform them? Here are some of the answers provided for this question: Eliezer's heter The prohibition against nichush applies only to Jews and not to benei Noach, and Eliezer had the status of a ben Noach (Tosafos, Chullin 95b s.v. Ke'eliezer). According to this approach, the story of Yonasan is difficult to explain, since he certainly did not qualify as a ben noach.

Another problem with this answer is that the Gemara (Sanhedrin 56b) records a dispute whether the prohibition against nichush applies to gentiles. Should one hold that the prohibition against nichush does apply to gentiles, one would answer that Eliezer did not rely on Rivkah's offering the water to propose the marriage to her, but waited until he had verified that she was indeed from Avraham's family (Tosafos, Chullin 95b s.v. Ke'eliezer).

Yonasan's heter Tosafos and the Ran (ad loc.) explain that Yonasan was planning to attack and was not using the nichush to make a decision. He used the nichush only so that his armor-bearer would be more confident that their attack would be successful. Since Yonasan was planning to proceed regardless of the outcome of his test, it was permitted to make the sign. The Radak's approach On the other hand, other rishonim dispute the understanding of the mitzvah of nichush and, furthermore, understand the passage of Gemara in a very different way. In their opinion, the prohibition of nichush applies only to things that are commonly perceived to have predictive value, either because of superstition, sorcery, idolatry or a similar reason. However, to base a decision on a sign that has no superstitious or clairvoyant basis is permitted. Therefore, neither Eliezer nor Yonasan was in violation of any halachic issue by using their signs to divine. The Gemara's purpose, when referring to Eliezer and Yonasan as examples of nichush, has nothing to do with the prohibition of the Torah banning nichush, but is teaching us that the simanim used by Eliezer and by Yonasan were both effective (Ra'avad, Hilchos Avodah Zarah, 11:4). This opinion holds that proper use of simanim is halachically permitted, but, as a matter of advice, should not be used, unless one can be reasonably certain that the siman is effective.

The entire passage Having explained the dispute defining what is included within the prohibition of nichush, I'll now present the entire passage of Gemara in which we find this quote.

Rav was traveling to the house of his daughter and son-in-law, Rav Chanah. The trip required crossing a river, which usually meant getting to the riverbank and waiting until appropriate transport showed up. As Rav approached the river, he saw that a ferry was approaching; this would shorten the time for him considerably. Rav then said: "The ferry came in my direction; we will have a celebration as a result!"

When Rav arrived at his daughter's house, they were in the process of butchering an animal. With the meat of that animal, Rav's family made a lavish meal in his honor, yet Rav did not partake in any of the meat. The Gemara suggests that Rav did not eat any of the meat because, since Rav had declared that the ferry's proximity had indicated a good omen which would be a reason for celebration, this would violate the Torah's law against nichush. The Gemara retorts that Rav himself had defined nichush as something similar to what was done by Eliezer, Avraham's slave, or by Yonasan the son of Shaul; any other practice does not constitute nichush. The Gemara's conclusion is that Rav did not eat meat for a completely unrelated reason — because he never participated in a festive meal unless it was a seudas mitzvah (Chullin 95b).

According to the Radak, Rav's original statement would never be a prohibited nichush practice, since the proximity of the ferry was not commonly used as a superstitious omen.

Therefore, one may use such a sign as a means of deciding on a future course of action.

How do we rule? The Rema (Yoreh Deah 179:4) cites both opinions without reaching a clear conclusion, and then closes by saying that one who lives his life sincerely and is confident in Hashem's ways will be surrounded by kindness, thus implying that it is better not to follow such signs.

The pesukim of children The Gemara (Chullin 95b) shares with us that Shmuel "checked with seforim" and Rabbi Yochanan "checked with children." What does this mean?

According to most authorities, this means that when planning what to do, Shmuel used some method of having the words of seforim assist him in his decision what to do. This is probably similar to, or identical with, the famous goral haGra, literally, the Gra's lottery, which involves turning pages a certain way for divine direction as to what to do in difficult circumstances. Rabbi Yochanan relied on a different approach, in which he would ask children what verses of the Torah they had just learned and would rely on their answer for direction. Some early authorities explain that relying on a pasuk of a child is like relying on the answer of a prophet, which is permitted (Semag; Ran; Shach, Yoreh Deah 179:5). Notwithstanding this approach, the Rambam still feels that one should not use either holy books or children's verses to choose what to do, and Shmuel and Rabbi Yochanan also did not do so. They would simply note, after the fact, that what resulted could have been

foretold on the basis of these methods, but they would not use these methods to plan in advance what to do.

Conclusion As Rav Hirsch explains, serving Hashem is something that we must do in a whole-hearted way, and includes understanding that all that Hashem does is for the good. Hashem alone decides our future, directs and guides our actions. The sole criterion to decide whether we should or should not do something is Hashem's Will. The goal of the truly sincere person is to perform what Hashem wants from him at the moment, and he will thus be impervious to worry (Commentary, Devorim 18:13).